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A ROMAN REPUBLIC IN HIGH SCHOOL¹

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Practical theorists have for some years centered their attacks on the classical studies as dead, unproductive of results, and useless in the already overcrowded curriculum. We know the fate of Greek; but believe that Latin can maintain its strong position against the thrusts of those who would narrow the limits of practical subjects. That matter, however, is not within the scope of this paper. At all events, teachers of Latin will hail with delight anything that offers an added interest to classical study. Especially will this be true of an organization that seeks as its aim to take the mind back into the dead past; reanimate to some extent the institutions of old Rome; and bring them back to their pupils a living reality. Just what has been attempted on this line in Little Rock High School it is my purpose to explain.

An organization to promote the study of Latin and of antiquities was effected in January, 1910, growing out of an idea that suggested itself to the writer, and still in process of development. The society is known as the *Res Republica Romana*; and its constitution is the constitution of ancient Rome. To those familiar with the fundamental principles of the Roman constitution, the parallels worked out will appear plain. Some things may appear somewhat amusing unless it be remembered that each formula is intended to impress on the pupils' minds an important truth. Those who have been initiated into the mysteries of Freemasonry or other secret orders, will appreciate the necessity of an undeviating adherence to set forms, on the unchanging repetition of which the very life of the order depends. The Romans were formalists, and their peculiar governmental procedure can best be presented in a formal way.

No one is elected to membership in this society. Every pupil

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electing Latin is conceived of as born into the commonwealth, and is a fully qualified Roman citizen. Therefore all Latin pupils are citizens whether they attend the various *contiones* and *comitia* or not. It is well known that the assemblies were poorly attended in ancient times; and I venture the assertion that our meetings have a much higher percentage of attendance, although it is not compulsory.

Besides the Roman civic body, the Republic recognizes Latin colonists—those who no longer study Latin, that is, have removed from Rome; *Municipii*—students of ancient history, to whom may be granted certain rights. All who are not Romans are barbarians; and the conquest of certain barbarian peoples is of advantage to the Roman people, as: Gauls, Germans, and Britons: i.e., the French, the German, and the English languages are to be mastered; and these same Gauls, Germans, and Britons are invited to settle within the borders of the Republic, and acquire the Latin language and civilization.

The populace is divided into orders. The Senior class forms the senatorial order; the equestrian order is composed of Juniors; and the Sophomores and the Freshmen are the plebeians. The magistracies belonging to these orders in ancient times, still belong to them.

For legislative purposes, the old tribal assembly is still adhered to. Each class section constitutes a tribe. The number of tribes has been reduced from thirty-five, the original number, to fifteen. Each tribe is assigned one of the old tribal names, and has one vote in the *comitia tributa*. The number of tribes varies each semester, depending upon the number of class sections. As evidence of a healthy growth in population, I am glad to say that two tribes have been added since last semester. For competitive purposes in class honors and scholarship, they are divided into city tribes, composed of Juniors and Seniors; suburban tribes, the Sophomores; near country tribes, the advanced Freshman; and remote country tribes, the incoming Freshmen. Thus the tribal location changes each semester; and the rustic tribes are conceived of as advancing to the heart of Rome to become the *tribus Palatina*, the tribal name of the Senior class.

The complicated old *comitia centuriata*, somewhat simplified, is still retained for the elections. Anciently, the *comitia centuriata* was divided into five classes on a basis of wealth, the units being twenty, fifteen, ten acres of land, etc. Our *comitia* is divided into classes also on a basis of wealth, but wealth in this case is the final average in Latin scholarship for the preceding semester. Corresponding to the land units, 90, 80, and 70 per cent are the requisite units of classification; and we have three classes instead of five. The unclassified landless poor of the ancient assembly, are represented in ours by those who failed the preceding semester. The original military division into Seniors and Juniors is simply represented by the division into boys and girls. I confess that the comital elections have not yet succeeded well. The Roman method is clumsy, and the procedure not well understood. Yet it is scarcely more hazy to our young Romans than to writers on the subject. The ancient *comitia* voted by classes, in their order, and the vote of a class was counted and announced before the next voted. Experience has shown that, to hold the interest, and not kill it by monotonous delays little understood by the voters, the method must be simplified. So we postpone the count until the voting is completed, and announce the result later.

The Republic is blessed with a complete set of magistrates, except as to number. There are a Pontifex Maximus, two consuls, four praetors, six quaestors, four aediles, two censors, and two tribunes of the plebs, all elected in the regular way, for one semester, except the censors, who are elected for two semesters; and the Pontifex Maximus, for life (i.e., till graduation, which, so far as the Republic is concerned, is death). Great difficulty is presented in finding representative duties for the horde of office-holders. In a way they correspond to standing committees in other organizations. The consuls preside alternately over the assemblies; the praetors pass judgment on those negligent of civic duty, such as failure to fill their places on the program; the quaestors are tax collectors when an assessment is made; the aediles are the program committee; the censors investigate the wealth of the citizens, classify them in the *comitia centuriata*, and pass upon matters of misconduct; the tribunes guard the rights of the plebs; and the

Pontifex Maximus announces the auspices, and presides over the *comitia curiata* when called to confirm the *imperium* conferred by the *comitia centuriata*. Each magistrate, when elected, takes an oath not to restore the kings, or permit others to do so; not to do anything against the best interests of the Republic; and he further swears to study faithfully the principles of the Roman constitution found in a codex Romanus (for want of a more appropriate name, a small type-written volume of thirty pages, prepared especially for the Republic), that he may the better perform his duties as a Roman magistrate. That awful modern specter, the suffrage question, does not rise in the darkness of the night to disturb the peaceful slumbers of Roman statesmen; for the ladies are happy in an equal division of the spoils, by custom, though not by law.

Magistrates receive, according to the importance of the office, five, six, or seven points, added to their final average at the end of their official term. The magistracy thus becomes an important asset, for the salary often saves the holder from final examination. But dereliction of duty or violation of oath may cause the forfeiture of the whole or a part of the salary; and in addition, the imposing of a fine. Citizens receive a stipend of one point a month for attending all the meetings of the assembly; and one point additional for appearing on the program. The tribal leaders are responsible for the record of attendance.

The program consists of music, recitations, papers on Roman subjects, and debate. The questions for debate are usually modern, with ancient setting, of which two or three examples will suffice: "John Jones, consul of the Roman people, asks for a law to disfranchise all whose grandfathers could neither read nor write"; which is really the Negro disfranchisement bill before the Arkansas legislature; but with an ancient background, it is directed against the blondes, whose grandfathers were the fair-haired German slaves; or, "a law is asked for to prevent the Roman people from acquiring more land on the west side of the Tiber, or seeking to reconquer that which has become free"; which is really a discussion of the bill before the legislature to prevent Little Rock from annexing Argenta. Another example: "John Smith, tribune of the plebs, asks for a law, forbidding the Roman

people from the unjust occupation of Northern Africa"—a discussion of the Italian occupation of Tripoli. After debate, the *contio* adjourns, and the tribes vote upon the bill.

In some respects, the Republic has not yet developed well. There is little room for parliamentary practice in a Roman assembly since citizens are expected to speak only when called by the president, who can shut them off at any time. Pupils recognize the fact that it is not to be conducted like a debating society, and are somewhat inclined to be reticent and inactive, lest they be wrong. But there is a lively interest in the proceedings, and the assemblies are quite largely attended. Recently, I have been considering the feasibility of dividing the activities of the Republic. At present, the senate exists only as an order. It seems advisable to set apart one of the two monthly meetings for a senate composed of Seniors and Juniors; and the other, for the *comitia tributa*, composed of Sophomores and Freshman. But the division, if made, should be with the understanding that all should attend just as before.

This is in brief the Roman Republic in Little Rock High School, and its bearing upon the pupils' work. The whole project is yet new. What its merit is, into what it may develop, or of what practical utility it may finally be to Classical Study, I do not presume to say. Time only can tell.

Since the presentation of this paper, the Roman Republic has arrayed itself into two opposing political parties, the Popular and the Senatorial, each with more or less conflicting interests, and demanding certain reforms. The plebeians insist on a lower property rating, a larger share of the magistracies, and more open debate in the assembly. The aristocracy opposes the demands of the popular party, and seeks to form a senate. The appearance at the assembly of magistrates in toga has been so strongly urged that the proposal seems likely to carry.